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City of Milwaukee Health Department Investigates Reports of Two Possible Norovirus Outbreaks

The City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) has received reports of two recent clusters of norovirus infection within institutional settings in the past two weeks. Noroviruses are a category of viruses that result in acute gastrointestinal illness that generally resolves in 2-3 days. The viruses are highly contagious and are easily transmitted in group settings as a result of poor hand washing and hygiene. Norovirus outbreaks have also been linked to contaminated food and water sources.

“These viruses are readily passed person-to-person and result in symptoms that include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea,” stated Paul Biedrzycki, Director of Disease Control and Environmental Health. “Good hygiene as well as disinfection of contaminated environmental surfaces is essential to break the chain of transmission.”

Norovirus infection can occur at any time of the year, including winter months when it is often mistaken as “stomach flu.” Noroviruses are unrelated to the influenza virus which results in respiratory illness. Onset of norovirus illness can occur within 1-2 days of exposure to an infected individual or from a contaminated food source. Persons in high risk occupations such as healthcare and food-handling, especially in institutional settings such as hospitals, nursing homes, daycares and school should not return to work until at least 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

Further information on norovirus can be obtained from the MHD website at www.milwaukee.gov/health